

Disney Focuses on Independence Lake

Firm Hopes to Develop Facility on 10,000 Acres

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TRUCKEE, Calif. (AP)—Walt Disney Productions, stymied in its dream of a year-round resort at Mineral King, has turned its attention to a small, man-made lake near the California-Nevada border.

Independence Lake, with 9,143-foot Mt. Lola rising from its shores, will be the site of the firm's latest family "destination" resort project, if local authorities approve.

Plans for the facility 192 miles east of San Francisco and 50 miles west of Reno were outlined at an informational meeting for county supervisors and planners here last week.

Disney will build the resort in a 10,000-acre area, of which less than 10% will be developed. The rest will remain in its natural state.

Included will be a pedestrian-oriented village, a 275-room lodge, underground parking, condominiums, shops, an electric-cog railway, a mountaintop restaurant and a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities, including skiing, hiking, camping and fishing.

The project is similar to that planned at Mineral King, a narrow, two-mile-long valley located at the 7,800-foot level of Sequoia National Forest in Central California and surrounded on three sides by Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park.

The controversial Mineral King development would have included an "American alpine village," several restaurants, shops, convention facilities and outdoor sports activities.

Mineral King was to be geared to 3,300 overnight guests and up to 8,000 skiers a day. Independence Lake will handle nearly 3,000 overnight visitors and 5,000 skiers each weekend day.

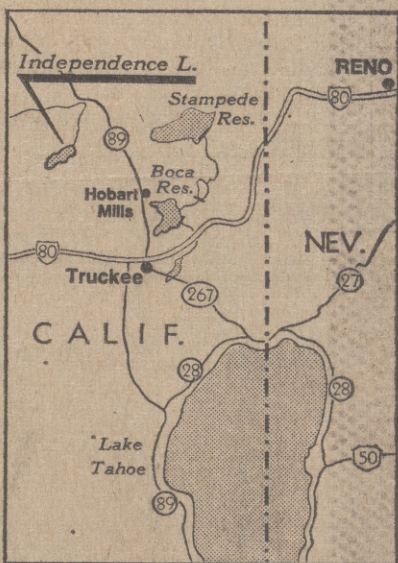
The Mineral King project was halted when it drew unalterable opposition from environmentalists, led by the powerful Sierra Club, which filed a suit in 1969.

When the court battle snarled Disney's plans, it put Mineral King on the back burner and started looking about for another site for the year-round recreation-oriented resort it so badly wanted to build.

"We haven't done any real work on Mineral King in five years or more," a Disney spokesman said. "It is very much in dead water."

While the project could be revived, it will have to wait until the Independence Lake resort is finished, probably around Thanksgiving, 1978.

"We do not see Independence Lake



as a substitute for Mineral King," Disney officials said, pointing out the attractions are aimed at different users.

Mineral King was conceived as a destination resort for Southern Californians, the firm said, while Independence will attract visitors from Northern California and the Northwest.

About two years ago, the Sierra Pacific Power Co. of Reno approached Disney Productions with a suggestion that one of its water storage lakes might offer a suitable location.

Last July, after studying several sites, Disney entered into a joint venture agreement with Sierra Pacific and with the Southern Pacific Land Co., principal property owners in the lake area.

Disney is the general and operating partner, while Southern Pacific, which owns 7,300 acres, and Sierra Pacific, owning 2,200 acres, are limited partners.

The key difference between Mineral King and Independence Lake is that while Mineral King would have required use of mostly public lands, almost all of the property to be used north of here is privately held.

There would be some skiing on forest service property and some ski lift towers might be built on public lands, Disney officials have said.

Disney officials hope to avoid some of the angry public opposition it met at Mineral King by working closely with Sierra County and Nevada County public officials. The resort will be partially in both counties.

Planning, barely a year old, is still in its initial stages and the resort may not reach the scope outlined last week. The key will be land-use capabilities as determined in studies now under way.

Independence Lake is a relatively small body of water, roughly two-

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and-a-half miles long and a half-mile wide, with a surface elevation of 6,949 feet. Sierra Pacific, which purchased the land around the lake in 1937, built a dam here in 1939.

The lake has been a resort retreat since the 1880s, when winter ice was a commercial product.

The lake reportedly was named by colorful adventuress Lola Montez, who, legend says, visited the area on July 4, 1853. The mountain overlooking the lake is named after her.

Last week's meeting was to announce that year-long preliminary

environmental and land-use studies have determined the area can support a major resort complex.

The next step will be more detailed design and cost studies by Disney employees and complete studies of ecology, recreation and social-economic aspects.

A detailed environmental impact report—the work of more than 25 individuals and firms—is expected to be completed by late this year.

Disney Productions also must obtain clearance from local planning authorities and the boards of supervisors in the two counties.